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Hymns for tradition or transition in changing times? The message of hymns and spiritual songs at spring services for school pupils and students in Finland in 2010 and 2020

by
Teija Pitkänen & Tapani Innanen

Abstract

Dieser Artikel untersucht die Verwendung von Hymnen und Liedern bei Schulgottesdiensten, die von der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche Finnlands in Zusammenarbeit mit lokalen Schulen am Ende des Schuljahres organisiert werden. Es werden Hymnen und Lieder sowohl bei traditionellen Schulgottesdiensten in Kirchen im Jahr 2010 als auch bei aufgezeichneten Frühlingsgottesdiensten im Jahr 2020 - aufgrund der COVID-19-Pandemie über das Internet - betrachtet. Die Ergebnisse der Textanalyse der Texte in den am häufigsten verwendeten Hymnen und Liedern zeigen, dass die Vielfalt der Hymnen und Lieder im Jahr 2020 zugenommen hat, aber die Verwendung traditioneller Hymnen und Schlüsselbegriffe wie Lobpreis, Schutz und Freude im Vergleich zum Jahr 2010 fast unverändert geblieben sind. Die meistgesungene Hymne, die Sommerhymne, ist zu einem institutionalisierten Übergangssignal zwischen Schul- und Sommerzeit geworden, aber sie trägt auch spirituelle Bedeutungen von Schöpfung, Lobpreis und Hoffnung, die in schweren Zeiten neue Bedeutungen erhalten.

This article explores the use of hymns and songs at school services organized by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland in co-operation with local schools at the end of the school year. Hymns and songs at both traditional school services in churches in 2010 and at recorded spring services in 2020 – via the internet, due to COVID-19 pandemic – are considered. The results of the text analysis of the lyrics in the most used hymns and songs reveal that the variety of hymns and songs increased in 2020, but the use of traditional hymns and key concepts, like praise, protection and joy, remained almost unchanged vis-à-vis the year 2010. The most sung hymn, the Summer Hymn, has become an institutionalized transition signal between school and summertime, but it also carries spiritual meanings of creation, praise, and hope that acquire new meanings in hard times.

Schlagwörter: Kirchenlied, Gesang, Schule, Kirche, Schulandacht, Finnland, COVID-19, Spiritualität

Keywords: Hymns, songs, school, church, school services, Finland, COVID-19, spirituality

1 Introduction

1.1 The background and the aim of the study

In Finland, local schools of the established educational system cooperate with local religious communities in multiple ways and are motivated by their pedagogical aims, especially with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland¹, the religious institution gathering the majority of Finnish population as members. Going to church has been

¹ Later in this article when using the concept “Church”, we refer to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland.

an important transition ritual at the beginning and, especially, at the end of the school year.

The cooperation became more difficult in spring 2020 because of the global pandemic of coronavirus disease (COVID-19). The schools were closed between mid-March until mid-May in Finland. Even after the schools opened again, the restrictions imposed by the Finnish governmental and municipal authorities and the Church forbade schools from going to church in order to prevent the spreading of the virus (Valtioneuvosto, 2020). As a result, the spring services were organized only virtually. Many parishes sent their spring services or at least some kind of summer greetings and blessings to the local schools via the internet, on their YouTube channel or in *The Virtual Church* (<https://www.virtuaalikirkko.fi>).

The aim of the article is to reveal which hymns and songs have been used at Finnish school spring services in 2010 and 2020, and the kind of message to be found in the lyrics of the most used hymns and songs.

The research questions are the following:

1. What hymns and spiritual songs were sung during the spring 2010 and spring 2020 in the Church?
2. What were the key concepts and meanings of the most sung hymns and spiritual songs; especially, how do texts describe God, the relationship between God and the people, and the community?
3. Which kind of change can be detected in the message of lyrics between 2010 and 2020?

The concept of *hymn* refers to a song that has been accepted by the General Synod in the official songbook of the Church, in its *Hymnal* (Virsikirja, 1986), and supplemented with the *Addendum* (Virsikirjan lisäviikko, 2015).

1.2 The context of school services in Finland

Finnish society has been strongly characterized by Lutheranism which was the state religion for centuries. The Constitution Act in 1919 and the Freedom of Religion Act in 1922 enshrined the principle of religious freedom into law: the Lutheran faith was no longer officially recognized as the state ideology. However, Lutheran Christianity was present in many kinds of activities in schools, depending on the decisions made in the local school. (Innanen, 2006, pp. 40–42, 49; Sakaranaho, 2014) In recent decades, the visibility of Lutheranism has decreased in Finnish society. Still in 2020, however, about 69 per cent of all Finnish population remain members of the Church (Evl, 2020).

Concerning other religious societies in Finland, the Greek Orthodox Church with about one percent of the Finnish population as its members is the next biggest. Both the Lutheran Church and the Orthodox Church are called “folk churches” and have, for the historical reasons, some special legislative rights, for instance the possibility to collect taxes from their members. There are dozens of other officially registered religious communities, which hold less than two percent of Finns as their members. A total of about 28 per cent of the Finnish population is not affiliated as official members to any registered religious community. However, a remarkable share of, for

instance, active Finnish Muslims or Pentecostals are included in this group of not registered religions. (Minedu, 2021)

The Freedom of Religion Act that was reformed in 2003 did not change much from the principles accepted 81 years earlier in terms of religion and the established schooling system. However, a more specified distinction between religious education given by school and practicing religion in the school was made. Since then, the school subject called Religion is barred from including the practice of religion; it must be pedagogically aimed at learning about or from religions and worldviews. The possible elements referring to religion in other school subjects or school events are seen from the pedagogical point of view to learn Finnish cultural heritage. (Innanen, 2006, pp. 95–96) On the other hand, a school can organize religious events depending on its own decision in the curriculum of a school year. This is motivated by the interpretation of positive freedom of religion, meaning that everyone should be free to practice his or her own religion. When a religious event is implemented the school has the duty to organize non-religious alternative program for those pupils or students not participating in the religious event. If and when the schools organize religious events, they have to ask the guardians of pupils in elementary or secondary school the permission to attend those events or the non-religious parallel program. The students of upper secondary schools can make this decision themselves. The possibility for school services is separately mentioned in the instructions. (Oph, 2018) The National Core Curriculum for Basic Education in 2014 even encourages the cooperation with local parishes along with other local actors, e.g. youth workers, libraries, culture, sports, police, companies, and societies, in order to increase the variety of learning environments and to support the educational tasks of the school (Oph, 2014, p. 36).

While the rights of pupils and students are formulated in great detail, in terms of rights of freedom of religion, only some general instructions concern teachers and school leaders. They are responsible for implementing the curriculum of their school, which also includes religious events if they are included to the program of a school year. On the other hand, the Constitution of Finland (Suomen perustuslaki, 1999, 11§) grants them negative freedom of religion: this means that no one is under the obligation to participate in practicing religion, against the dictates of his or her conscience. The responsibilities of organizing, for instance, Lutheran school services, are normally a part of practical everyday division of labor in the school. The close cooperation with the local Lutheran parish is a remarkable help for the school. In most cases the school services are organized during the normal school day, and that is why parents of pupils normally do not participate in school services.

In 2019, more than nine out of ten (91 %) parishes were involved in organizing school services, often during Advent or Easter time, but almost three out of four (71 %) parishes participated in other activities of the school year as well (Hytönen, 2020). It is estimated that a considerable majority of the children and youth who attend the nine-year comprehensive education and upper secondary schools in Finland attend Lutheran school services every year. We can state that school services are the most far-reaching activities where school aged people participate in worship life for several years.

1.3 Hymns and songs for institutional tradition and spiritual growth

Andrew Pratt (2016) recognizes the strong connections hymns have to their Christian church context. At the same time, he states how “the power of hymns” has to be “recognized beyond this context”. According to him, hymns have given voice to people’s fears and been a vehicle for their hopes. Pratt strongly emphasizes that

hymns, however strong their relation to church institution may be, should relate their texts to the surrounding world and “find metaphors that enable rather than obstruct development” (Pratt, 2016).

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland offers many alternatives for school services so that the school context can be taken into consideration in services. Its collection of orders, the *Orders of Worship* (Jumalanpalvelusten kirja, 2000), does not include a separate liturgy for school services, but recommends the order of *Service of the Word* or *Family Service* in services for schools. The orders give the guidelines for the liturgy and the selection of hymns according to their place in the liturgy, and thus offer the traditional choices. At the same time, the *Orders of Worship* leave a lot of freedom in terms of choosing the hymns and songs, because it states that the time of the church year, the resources, and the age and the life situation of the participants may guide the selection of alternatives. According to the *Orders of Worship*, it is in the nature of worship that it is planned and carried out together with the parishioners. (Jumalanpalvelusten kirja, 2000, pp. 7–9).

Sari Murtonen (2016) has investigated how Finnish young adults have experienced the characteristics of music in terms of their religious or non-religious spiritualities. According to her in-depth interviews, it was obvious that Christian hymns could provide a learned repertoire for personal spiritual experiences as an adult whether the one’s world view was Christian or not. One of Murtonen’s informants with non-Christian spirituality used to sing hymns familiar from childhood: “[t]he hymns gave her a feeling of shelter that no other music could provide” (Murtonen, 2016). This description of shelteredness when singing a hymn comes close to the experience of transcendent as Lisa Miller (2016, pp. 166–177) defines it in her study on children’s spirituality, naming “transcendent knowing” as one of the six core spiritual strengths.

To interpret her results, Murtonen (2016) has built a theoretical framework, given in Figure 1:

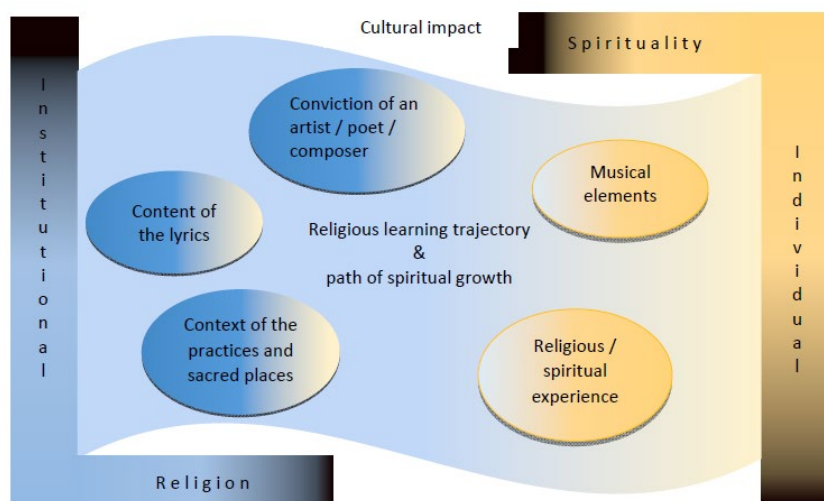


Figure 1: The elements through which the young adults with Christian spiritualities evaluated music as spiritual as set against their religious background, learning trajectory, individual spirituality and path of spiritual growth . *Note:* The figure is adapted from “Young Adults and Spiritually Experienced Music” (Murtonen, 2016, p. 216) with permission from The Church Research Institute.

The main distinction in Murtonen's figure is that of institutional religion and individual spirituality. Murtonen has based her understanding of spirituality on the works of authors such as David Hay and Rebekka Nye (2006): Spirituality is a universal entity referring to an individual's relationships to the sacred or the search of something that could be viewed as sacred. These kinds of spiritually sacred experiences can be connected to different religious or non-religious cultural contexts. Nurturing children's spirituality promotes the development of children's identity, morality, and social inclusion (Hay & Nye, 2006; Miller, 2018), and thus spirituality needs to be taken seriously in the educational systems.

Development of individual spirituality is also related to the individual's personal learning trajectory, which Murtonen (2016) interprets in the context of James W. Fowler's (1981) theory of religious development. Tapani Innanen (2016) has used Erik Erikson's (1980) developmental theory of life cycle with its eight psychosocial stages when studying the Finnish people of various ages singing Christmas songs. Innanen concluded that the individual interpretations of hymns and songs change in relation to personal experiences and to developmental stages throughout one's lifespan.

2 Hymns and songs of school services

2.1 The data: hymns and songs used at the studied services

The data consists of two lists of hymns and songs of the school services that were organized by the Church in spring 2010 and 2020.

Teija Pitkänen collected the 2010 hymns and songs during the autumn 2011 as part of the study on the usage of hymns in the Church. Pitkänen sent a questionnaire and alternatively, asked for copies of church diaries from 105 parishes. As a result, she obtained the lists of all hymns that were used at main services during the church year 2009–2010 (29.11.2009–21.11.2010).²

In this article, only the hymns of school services in spring were taken into consideration. In the church diaries and the extra pages of the questionnaire Pitkänen could find the hymn lists of many school services as well, so Pitkänen managed to gather the hymns of 113 different school services. The school services were most often organized at the end of the school year, at the end of May or beginning of June: the total number of them was 44 of all 113 services. In addition, there were also many services during the Christmas and Easter time, as well as at the beginning of the autumn term in August. Here we focus on the spring services.

To compare with the data of 2010, Teija Pitkänen collected the second list of hymns and songs from the videos of 69 spring services in YouTube and Virtual Church in 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic that made the live spring services together with pupils and students impossible in Finland, the parishes put their virtual services to their channels on YouTube or Virtual Church. With various keywords like "spring church", "school service", or "school church" she found 58 spring services in YouTube and 11 in Virtual Church. The videos were watched and all hymns and songs were

² As a whole, the data included 40 820 single marks of used hymns. The data collecting process of the study on the usage of hymns is explained in more detail in Pitkänen, 2012, and Pitkänen, 2014.

listed in the table along with other information on the parish, the place (mostly in church, but also in the nature or elsewhere), the length of the video, and the pastors and assistants. There were school pupils as assistants in 13 services, either singing, playing an instrument, or reading the Bible or prayers, so at least those services were planned together with schools. The length of the videos varied from 4 minutes 36 seconds to 50 minutes 56 seconds. The number of hymns or songs at the services varied from one (if one, then H571 *the Summer Hymn*) to six hymns or songs, but at most services there were only two or three hymns or songs.

The data can be categorized according to their institutional background. The official hymns are from the Finnish *Hymnal* (Virsikirja, 1986) and the *Addendum* (Virsikirjan lisävihko, 2015). *Lasten virsi*, in English *The Children's Hymn*, (Eerola, 1997; Torri-Tuominen, 2012) is a collection where several hymns of the *Hymnal* are included but the content of the book is accepted and published by a private Lutheran organisation. The third group of songs are from unofficial Christian songbooks or just single published songs.³

2.2 Hymns and songs sung at spring services

We counted the frequencies of all the hymns and songs of the spring services. The following Table 1 shows the names of the hymns and songs⁴ used at least three times in either 2010 or 2020, and the frequencies both in the 2010 and 2020 data.

Table 1: Names and frequencies of the hymns and songs at spring services of schools in 2010, 2020, and totally

| Name of the hymn /The first line of the hymn | Count 2010 | Count 2020 | Count totally |
|--|---------------|---------------|------------------|
| The Summer hymn/The blessed time came already (H571) <i>Suvivirsi/Jo joutui armas aika; orig. Den blomstertid nu kommer</i> | 43 | 68 | 111 |
| God made the Sun and the Moon (H135) <i>Jumala loi auringon, kuun; orig. Mone och sol, vatten och vind</i> | 23 | 28 | 51 |
| Bless the whole world/Listen, heavenly Father, to this request (H501) <i>Siunaa koko maailmaa/Kuule, Isä taivaan, pyyntö tää</i> | 5 | 15 | 20 |
| The heavenly Father gives us protection (H503) <i>Taivaan Isä suojan antaa</i> | 9 | 4 | 13 |
| Again with flowers You dress the hills (H572) <i>Taas kukkasilla kukkulat, orig. Sua, Herra, hiljaisuudessa</i> | 10 | 1 | 11 |
| In the palm of God's hand (H499) <i>Jumalan kämmenellä</i> | 3 | 7 | 10 |
| Prayer is a bridge / Sometimes the flower bend of joy grows inside us (A931) <i>Rukous on silta Joskus sisimpäämme</i> | | 8 | 8 |

³ Later in this article, these sources are cited using abbreviations H, A, and OS as follows: hymn 571 in the Hymnal = H571, hymn 967 in the Addendum = A967, song in some other source = OS.

⁴ The translations of the hymn and song titles are ours.

| | | | |
|--|-----|-----|-----|
| kasvaa ilon kukkamaa | | | |
| The Spirit of Truth (H484) <i>Totuuden Henki, orig. Sanningens Ande</i> | 3 | 4 | 7 |
| Give us your peace (H514) <i>Anna meille rauhasi, orig. Gib uns Frieden jeden Tag</i> | 5 | 2 | 7 |
| Oh, how the spring shines (H567) <i>Ah, kuinka kevät hohtaa, orig. Wie liblich ist der Maien)</i> | 5 | 2 | 7 |
| Lord, in Your hands (H517) <i>Herra, kädelläsi</i> | 4 | 2 | 6 |
| Touch me, the Spirit (H125) <i>Kosketa minua, Henki</i> | 2 | 3 | 5 |
| Praise the good Lord (H332) <i>Herraa hyvää kiittäkää, orig. Lova Gud i himmelshöjd</i> | 4 | | 4 |
| For the honour of the Creator (H462) <i>Soi kunniaksi Luojan</i> | 4 | | 4 |
| To you Lord, we raise (H486) <i>Puoleesi Herra lumme, orig. Sun puolees, Herra, lumme</i> | 4 | | 4 |
| I lift my eyes up to heaven (H490) <i>Mä silmät luon ylös taivaaseen, orig. Jag lifter ögat mot himmelen</i> | 3 | | 3 |
| Morning has broken (A967) <i>Nousta sain aamuun, orig. Morning has broken</i> | | 3 | 3 |
| I would like to wish to you (CH83) <i>Tahtoisin toivoa sinulle</i> | | 3 | 3 |
| Farewell (CH169) <i>Jäähyväiset</i> | | 3 | 3 |
| Patchwork quilt (OS) <i>Tilkkutäkki</i> | | 3 | 3 |
| Spring has come (OS) <i>Kevät on tullut</i> | | 3 | 3 |
| other hymns and songs (1–2 times each): 30 (2010), 41 (2020) | 33 | 44 | 77 |
| totally | 160 | 203 | 363 |

In spring 2010, the number of usage of hymns was 160, including 45 different hymns (15 hymns named in Table 1 and 30 other hymns). Correspondingly, in spring 2020, the number of usage of hymns and songs was 203, and 58 different hymns or songs were sung in them (17 named in Table 1 and 41 other hymns and songs). Among the 21 hymns listed in the Table 1, there are six hymns (H571, H135, H501, H503, H499, and H484) that were used at least three times both in 2010 and 2020. In this article we call them common hymns.

The hymn that was most frequently sung at spring services both in 2010 and in 2020 was the *Summer Hymn*, H571, but there were also other hymns like H572 and H567 describing summer or spring season.

Concerning the sources of hymns and songs, there are some differences between the data of 2010 and 2020. Table 1 shows that only hymns of the official *Hymnal* were used at least three times in 2010. The respective usage in 2020 data shows that nine were hymns in the *Hymnal*, two in the *Children's Hymn*, and two from other sources.

The difference between the usage of 2010 and 2020 widens when looking at the table of all hymns and songs. In 2010, all hymns were from the *Hymnal*, but in 2020 there were 23 hymns from the *Hymnal* (of which 5 from the *Addendum*), 8 songs from the *Children's Hymn*, and 27 songs from other sources. It is possibly due to the method of collecting the data, but also the form of the services. In spring 2010, the questionnaire focused on the hymns of services, as other types of songs were not inquired into. In 2020, the videos of spring services were observed as a whole, and then all kinds of hymns and songs were listed in the table. What is more, when organizing the services outside the church building, there was often no liturgical order as defined in the *Orders of Worship* (Jumalanpalvelusten kirja, 2000), which may have loosened the criteria for selecting the hymn and songs.

By far the most used hymn or song in the data was H571, *the Summer Hymn*: it was sung in all but one services in both 2010 and 2020. The hymn was composed in Sweden as early as 1697. According to Finnish hymnologist Tauno Väinölä, Many generations of Finns have sung this beautiful and “summersmelling” hymn into their hearts, and “the Summer Hymn is associated with the end of school, the Midsummer church and many kinds of celebrations in summer” (Väinölä, 2008, pp. 585–587). Following the instructions of the Board of Education, this hymn is considered a cultural and traditional element in celebrations (Oph, 2018; Urponen, 2020, pp. 20, 25). Its frequent use hints at the fact that it has become a mark of transition between the school year and the summer holiday. In spring 2020, there was a Finnish contest in which a new verse was selected to H571 as the verse seven, from 62 different suggestions. The new verse tells about the climate change and corona restrictions, but also about the light and hope from God. (Kytöharju, 2020) It is not an official verse of the *Summer Hymn*, but it was sung at three spring services in our data from 2020.

The second hymn in Table 1 was the hymn number 135, *God made the Sun and the Moon*. Its frequent use can be explained at least partly by its function in the liturgical order. It is one of the hymns that are recommended in the *Orders of Worship* as a thanksgiving hymn to triune God following Gloria in family services (Jumalanpalvelusten kirja, 2000, p. 54). On the other hand, the hymn describes nature in a way that highlights the message of creation in spring.

3 Results of the text analysis of hymns and songs

3.1 The key concepts in hymns and songs

The lyrics of 21 hymns and songs, used at least three times and shown in Table 1, were studied using text analysis. At first, the concepts referring to God, faith, people, community, nature, and the world, were marked in the texts and added to a table. Secondly, the frequency of various concepts was counted in hymn and song texts. All sources (hymn/song and the verse) of concepts were written in the table, too. Thirdly, the concepts were studied in their context, and categories of concepts were formed according to their common features or relations. Finally, the concepts were organized again inside the categories according to their frequency.

The following Figure 2 includes 30 key concepts in eight categories, marked in Roman numerals. It is a concise version of the original table, presenting only the concepts that appeared in at least four different hymns. The concepts regarding images of God are studied separately in chapter 3.2.

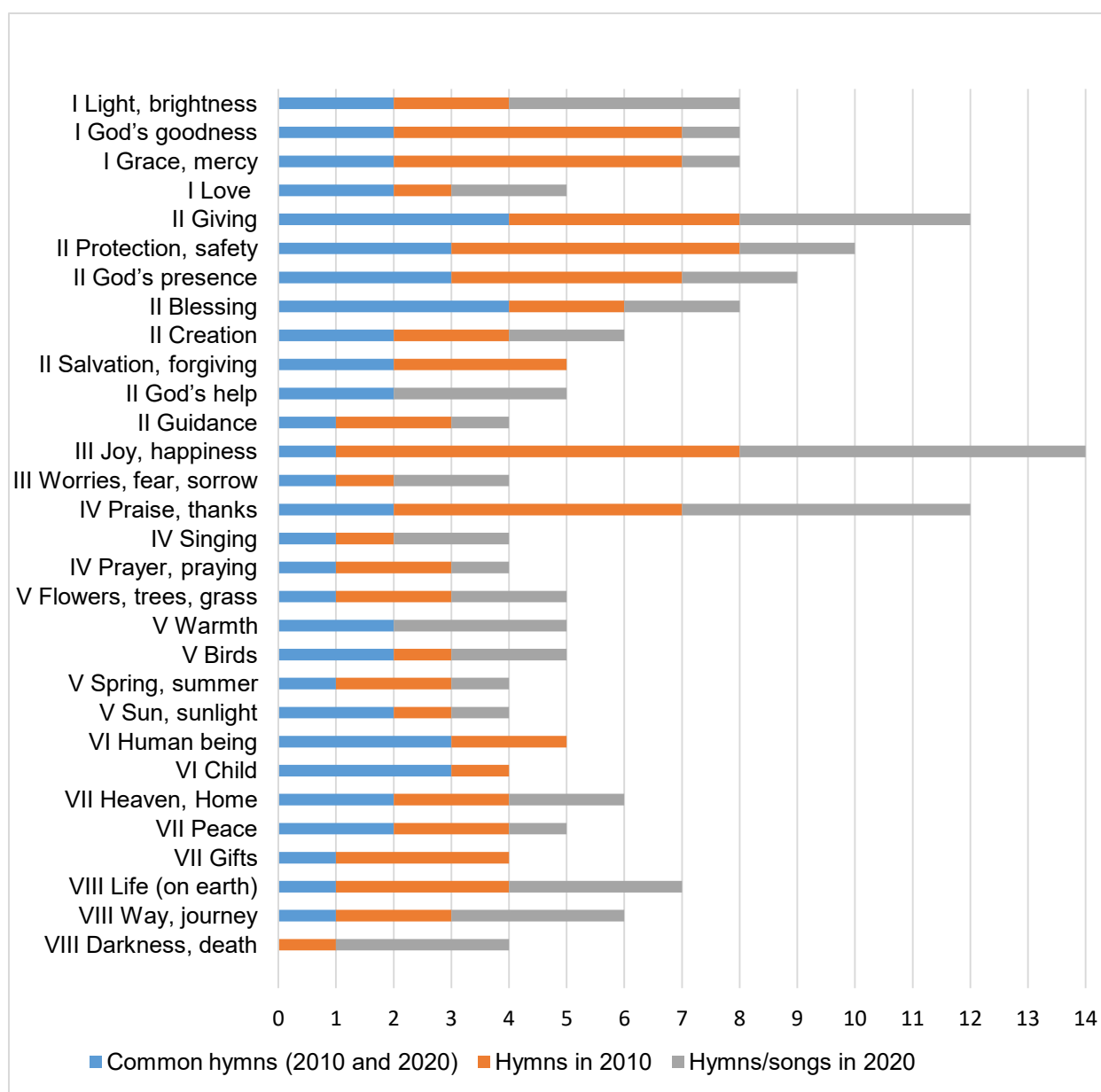


Figure 2 : Key concepts in hymns and songs of spring services in 2010 and 2020

The key concepts of the most frequently sung hymns and spiritual songs in spring 2010 and 2020 are presented below within each category.

The first category (I) is called “God’s attributes”, and it includes *light* or *brightness*, *goodness*, *grace* or *mercy*, and *love*. In addition, there was also *holiness*, which was mentioned in only three hymns, and thus it is not included in Figure 2. The definitions of *goodness* and *grace* or *mercy* were more present in 2010, but in 2020 *light* or *brightness* was used more frequently. The example is quoted from H484⁵, verse 3:

⁵ The exact bibliographical references of the composers or poets of hymns in the Hymnal or the Addendum can be seen on the website of the Hymnal (Virsikirja 1986; Virsikirjan lisäviikko 2015).

(1)

Christ is our way, the light of our heart,
our only hope, our saint truth.
Your grace, Jesus, give for our strength; renew us.⁶

The second category (II), “God’s doings”, describes God’s actions like *giving*, *protection* or *safety*, *God’s presence*, *blessing*, *creation*, *salvation*, *forgiving*, *God’s help*, and *guidance*. God as giving and blessing is frequent in hymns that are common for spring services in 2010 and 2020. The first lines of H135 are a good example:

(2)

God created sun and the moon,
and lakes and trees, people, too.
The heaven and earth belong to God.

The elements of *protection* or *safety* and *God’s presence* are more present in the hymns of 2010. However, when looking at the contents of the hymns and songs in 2020, God’s presence is evident, but it is described in other ways than in words. The elements of nature as in H967 *Morning has broken* and in the song *Spring has come* refer metaphorically to doings and presence of God. In addition, praying as in H931, *Praying is the bridge*, includes the idea that God is present. Interestingly, the concept of *Salvation* is not present in the hymns and songs that were sung only in spring 2020.

The third category (III), “People’s emotions”, describes how people feel with and without God. There is not much change in figures, but a rule: People’s normal life is full of worries – *worries*, *fear* or *sorrow* - and there are all kinds of dangers in the world. However, when people trust in God, they feel *joy* or *happiness*:

(3)

My happiness is to be near to Lord
I can lean on God only. (H517)

The fourth category (IV), “People’s reactions to God”, contains the people’s response to God and his doings. The key concepts are *praise* or *thanks*, *singing* and *prayer* or *praying*. Praising and thanking is the most common reaction in both 2010 and 2020. Thanking God comes vividly true in the verse 3 of H571, the *Summer Hymn*:

(4)

Attach my soul to the choir of your voice,
and thank the Lord of grace
because He is graceful.

⁶ The translations of all the hymn and song quotations are ours.

The concepts of the fifth category (V), “Season”, include *warmth*, *flowers* or *trees* or *grass*, *birds*, *spring* or *summer*, and *sun* or *sunlight*. What is more, the songs that were taken from other sources than the *Hymnal* or the *Children’s Hymn* contain even more concepts from nature. The titles of songs hint to this: *The sun shines to us* (“Meille aurinko paistaa”), *Do you hear the wind sing* (“Kuuletko tuulen laulavan”), or *The sun is here again* (“Aurinko on jälleen täällä”)⁷. Interestingly, these elements of nature become almost synonym for God, especially in the hymns and songs of 2020. The following example from the song *Spring has come* illustrates how the wording of season and sunlight describes Christian belief and the victory from death:

(5)

The spring has come, it carries the message,
light is stronger than death.
The spring has come, it gives hope,
therefore rejoice now!
(words Anna-Mari Kaskinen, melody Pekka Simojoki)

The sixth category (VI) is “Community”. In Figure 2, there are concepts of *child* and *human being*. They were not very frequent in the hymn words. *Friend* was mentioned, too, but in only one hymn in common and two of 2020. We will present the descriptions of community later in more detail.

The seventh category (VII), “Faith”, contains many things and objects that God has given to people or mentioned in the Bible. There are only three in Table 2, *heaven* or *home* (in the meaning of heavenly home), *peace* and *gifts*. *Heaven* is very close to the concept of *eternal life* that was mentioned only twice, and therefore not listed in Table 2. Both concepts are illustrated with the example (6):

(6)

Please protect me, you graceful Father,
with the strength of your Spirit,
and guide my way to heaven,
to the eternal life there. (H490:5)

What also interests us, are the concepts that are missing from the list of this category. The concepts of *hope*, *angels*, *freedom*, *soul*, *miracles*, *baptism*, *victory*, *cross*, and *belief* were in the original table, but too rare to include in Figure 2. Even more, the concept of *sin* was absent in all lyrics of this study. The missing *sin* underlines the observation with the category of “God’s doings” that the importance of salvation is diminishing.

The eight category (VIII), “World”, contains *darkness* or *death*, but also *life* and *way or journey*. The world is full of darkness, but people will survive with God. The example (7) illustrates this:

⁷ These songs are not in Table 1, because they were sung only once or twice.

(7)

Sometimes dark fear comes quietly to heart.
Many people carry their worries all alone.
Through the darkness goes the way of prayer.
Don't be afraid alone, take your worries to God. (H931:2)

3.2 The image of God and his relationship with people

What kind of image of God is there to be found in the hymn texts of the spring services in 2010 and 2020? In the text analysis, all descriptions of the three persons of the Trinitarian God were studied in each hymn and song. The results are shown in Table 2 below. The labels of God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are listed according to their frequency in the hymn texts so that the most frequent is on the top:

Table 2: The Images of God in hymns and songs in 2010 and 2020

| | Presence in common hymns and songs | Presence in hymns and songs 2010 | Presence in hymns and songs 2020 |
|-----------------|--|---|--|
| God | Father God Lord Creator (Children's) Friend Heavenly Father Lord of mercy Merciful father Our friend | Lord Creator God Father Lord in heaven Our God | Creator God Lord Helper Heavenly Father Bringer of life |
| Jesus | Jesus Light of our heart Jesus Christ Bright light Christ | Jesus | Jesus Good friend |
| The Holy Spirit | Spirit Spirit of truth | Spirit | Spirit Spirit of God |

As we can see, both God and Jesus have many labels. In the hymns that are common for 2010 and 2020, God is most often called *Father*, secondly *God*, and thirdly, *Lord*. The order of various labels is different in the hymns that were listed in 2010 or 2020. In 2020, God was most frequently called *Creator*, and there were interesting labels as *Helper* or *Bringer of life*. Jesus has many labels especially in common hymns. The use of *Light* appears for Jesus in two versions, *Light of our heart* and *Bright light*.

Based on Table 2, there was not much change in the image of God in the ten years between 2010 and 2020. According to hymn texts, there is a close relationship between God and the people. The same closeness is visible in the concepts of category "God's doings" and category "People's reactions to God" in Figure 2. The lyrics describe God as the good and loving Father who is always present, blesses and helps people, hears people's prayers, and gives his gifts – and finally, guides them to

heaven. There is no sign of Warlord or Judging God who condemns people to hell, as the sin or hell are not even mentioned in the hymn texts.

H499 is a good example of God who is always with his children and protects people:

(8)

God invites us now to the safe shelter,
God invites us and carries with his power.
He never abandons, he is with his children.
In the palm of God's hand, nobody is unsafe. (H499:2)

3.3 Descriptions of community

How do the hymn and song texts describe community, including family, parish, church, or school? In the hymn texts, the descriptions of the community were very rare, as can be seen in Figure 2. The school was mentioned only in H486, together with home:

(9)

You have blessed the work in our school.
Bless also our homes now that we go there again.

The ending of school was also mentioned in the hymn *Spring has come* saying that “the year's school work is over”.

Interestingly, the community was referred to inclusively with the plural form of the first person, with the pronouns *we*, *our* or *us*. The first-person plural was used in five (out of six) hymns and songs that were in common, including the most frequently used hymns, H571 and H135. As for the hymns of spring 2010, there were six (out of seven) hymns that used the first person in plural. In hymns of 2020, there was a clear change in the usage: Most of the songs that were not in common included only the first person singular *I / my / me*, or the second person singular *you/your(s)/you*. However, this did not refer to the lack of community, but rather the personal relationship between *I* and *you*, as in CH83 (in Torri-Tuominen, 2012) example (10) below:

(10)

I would like to wish you something very good,
the swish of angel's wings
and deep joy and happiness.
(words Anna-Mari Kaskinen, melody Petri Laaksonen)

Sometimes the concept *Warmth* was not only about summer season but referred to the loving community. This is the case in the following example in *Patchwork quilt* that nicely shows how the presence of God reflects in the community:

(11)

We are different small patches next to each other.
Now we are a big warm blanket, as one in our Lord.
(words Kaija Löytty, melody Jaakko Löytty)

4 Discussion

In recent years, there have been a lot of changes in society and the learning environment in Finland. The biggest change has taken place following the restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. This was the reason why the spring services in 2020 were sent only virtually via the internet.

In 2010, all hymns of the spring services were from the official *Hymnal*. The variety of hymns and songs at virtual services in 2020 was much wider than at traditional services in 2010. There are probably many explanations, like form of collecting the data or organizing the services. In addition, there might be local, cultural, and individual preferences when selecting the hymns, along with the pandemic. Following the liturgy of the *Orders of Worship* (Jumalanpalveluksen käsikirja, 2000), the selection of hymns is based on the recommendations of the order, but also the time of the church year and the need of participants. In 2020, many spring services had pupils or students as assistants, so it is likely that they or their teachers participated in the planning process, suggesting the hymns and songs they wish.

When organizing the religious event during the school day, the event must also follow the principles of the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (Oph, 2014) and the curriculum of the single school. The spring services carry the elements of celebrating the end of the school year, start of summer, and psychologically, growing older as a child or an adolescent, which are reflected in the selection of hymns and songs. Thus, the services and their hymns and songs serve as open environments for educational purposes developing the skills and identity of the pupils and students according to their stages of development (cf. Erikson, 1980; Fowler, 1981).

When placing the sources of hymns and songs to Murtonen's (2016) Figure 1, the whole data from 2010 belongs to the institutional end, whereas the data from 2020 with its more unofficial songs spreads between institutional and individual dimensions. However, the hymns and songs that were used most often are the traditional hymns in both 2010 and 2020. The most used hymn, the *Summer Hymn*, has become ritualized as a transition signal - sign of summer both at school and at church in Finland, but also in Finnish culture and society in general. It is highly institutionalized, but according to the text analysis, it includes spiritual dimensions and many concepts that refer to God and faith. The usage of the new, unofficial verse of the *Summer Hymn* underlines Pratt's (2016) statement that hymns have to evolve together with changing times and situations.

Interestingly, the key concepts of the hymn texts in 2010 and 2020 have not changed much, although the concept of *salvation* seemed to diminish its importance at spring services in 2020. However, the figures of nature became more common in 2020, and there was more of metaphorical use of the concepts like *light*, *sun*, and *spring*. The presence of God that is evident in most hymn texts, also in the *Summer Hymn*, is described either using the labels of the Triune God, or in the deeper level of the

context. One may question, following the Miller's (2018) idea of score spiritual strengths, if the children and students at school can feel the transcendence at their spring services – especially when singing the hymns and songs – and thus get support for their spiritual growth.

The hymns and songs at spring services function on many different levels. They belong to the spiritual music that affects and raises emotions. They also create memories with specific environments where the hymns and songs have been sung, as Murtonen (2016) states. A question arises, what is the difference between a service in a church and a service via the internet from the children's and students' point of view? Can they participate in singing the hymns and songs? The hymns and songs of the services are originally meant for communal singing, and the importance and the memories they create is dependent on the intensity of participating. Unfortunately, the videos in YouTube do not tell the form or amount of participating and singing, only the numbers of watching.

As for the future studies, it would be interesting to study the hymns and songs over a longer period and see the possible change in the following ten years.

As Murtonen's theoretical Figure 1 above emphasizes, the content of lyrics in hymns and songs is closely related to the institution where the hymns are used, but multiple individual meanings of them are not only depending on the lyrics. One could almost say it in the opposite way: lyrics are only a tiny – although important! – part of the wide picture where the meanings of hymns and songs for children and youth have to be interpreted. However, our results suggest that the lyrics of hymns and songs can be an important learned repertoire for remarkable number of Finnish children and youth both immediately when they attend the school services and throughout years after that.

Although new spiritual songs were used in 2020, the role of traditional hymns was strong. As in 2010, the hymns still told of God as a protector who is present even in the darkest times. The words were almost the same, but the meaning was possibly different – as it is always different in changing times. In times of danger, during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, God's protection, blessing and presence may have felt even more comforting than in "normal" circumstances. The traditional setting of learning environment, i.e. school services and their hymns, provided new meaningful relevance in the context of pandemic. For both the school community and individuals, it was important to keep faith and hope for the future, and trust in something that stays over time. This is also illustrated in the new unofficial verse of the Summer Hymn:

(12)

Although summers and winters started to look alike
and we could not come together to celebrate the time of light,
let us, Creator, learn to trust
that the shadows can not win your brightness.
(571:7, words Tuuli Charalambous, 2020)

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